

Record

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Group accuses Vietnam of executions

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Three ethnic minority Christians have been executed by Vietnamese authorities as part of a recent crackdown on "illegal" Christian churches, according to the Montagnard Foundation, a human rights watch group based in South Carolina.

The three Montagnard believers — Y-Suon Mlo, from Buon Kuang village, Y-Het Nie Kdam, from Buon Ea Tio village, and Y-Wan Ayun, from Buon Gram village in Vietnam's Central Highlands — reportedly were injected Oct. 29 with an unknown drug and died in convulsions after being convicted of participation in anti-government activities in February 2001.

Those "anti-government" activities included a peaceful protest by hundreds of Montagnards in favor of religious liberty and against government corruption in key Central Highlands cities. Following the protests, Vietnamese authorities began a systematic campaign to force Christians out of unregistered churches, which they believed had been infected by American Protestant thought that, as one source put it, "opposes the programs of the country."

The situation had cooled, but Compass Direct news service reported Nov. 13 that Vietnamese authorities had intensified persecution of Montagnard Christians in the highlands region while more than 1,000 Montagnards fled into Cambodia.

Several hundred Montagnards sought and were granted political asylum in the U.S.

By September, 354 of 412 churches in Dak Lak province alone had been forcibly disbanded. More than 50 pastors and elders were said to have "disappeared." Dak Lak province is adjacent to the Cambodian border.

No official news agency has yet confirmed the report of the recent executions in Dak Lak province, but critics of the Vietnamese government's human rights record are not inclined to dismiss reports of executions, and even mass killings.

According to the Center for Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C., the Vietnamese government is still following its "Official Plan 184," a secret plan established between 2000-2001 to "eradicate Christianity among tribal minorities."

The center learned of the plan through state documents smuggled out of the Southeast Asian nation.

A report released last April by Human Rights Watch



PERSECUTED BELIEVERS — Montagnard men in Vietnam's Central Highlands carve a drum from wood for a village festival. Many members of the ethnic minority have forsaken animism and ancestor worship to become Christians, which has led to severe persecution from the Vietnamese communist government. (BP photo)

(HRW), a New York-based human rights lobby, cited multiple instances of torture, mutilation and intimidation on the part of Vietnamese authorities.

In March 2001, for instance, Cong An (Vietnamese police) ordered Vietnamese villagers to enter a Montagnard village and destroy the village church with axes. Some villagers were reported to have been killed. Authorities then forced the Montagnards to burn the remains of their own church.

"Everyone was crying — for the dead and wounded and for the church," one Montagnard told an HRW researcher.

In other instances, authori-

ties tortured ethnic minority Christians to elicit confessions of revolutionary activity and public statements of remorse, the report said.

The 200-page report, "Repression of Montagnards: Conflicts over Land and Religion," was dismissed as a fabrication by Phan Thuy Thanh, Vietnam's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, but critics claim that the reports are true.

Mike Jendrzeczyk, the Washington-based director of HRW's Asia division, told the Australian Broadcasting Company Oct. 1 that the reports of Christians being persecuted in Vietnam are reliable.



UNCERTAIN FUTURE — A Montagnard child peers out his hut into an uncertain future for his people. Even before intensified persecution against the ethnic minority, the Montagnards in Vietnam's Central Highlands faced numerous challenges such as malnourishment suffered by this child and others. (BP photo)

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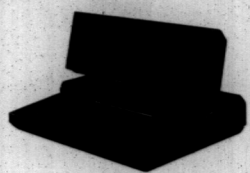
Miss. CP down to wire

Mississippi Baptists gave \$2,342,119 in the month of November to the work of the Lord through the Mississippi Cooperative Program (CP), according to Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) which disburses the funds. The November amount is 16.97% less than the \$2,820,950 given the month before, but 5.4% higher than the \$2,222,079 given in November 2001. The 2002 Mississippi CP budget, as approved by messengers to the 2001 annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, is presently a mere .42% ahead of requirements. A monthly CP giving total of \$2,543,558 is needed to meet the record 2002 budget of \$30,522,692. Only five of the 11 months in the current fiscal year have exceeded that amount, but total CP giving this year has been buoyed by an all-time record in January (\$3,389,338) and the other four months in which the pro-rata amount was exceeded. With one month to go in the MBCB fiscal year, it appears meeting the 2002 CP budget will go down to the wire. Mississippi CP helps fund such programs as the Youth Evangelism Conference December 30-31 at Baptist-affiliated Mississippi College in Clinton.

SBC CP rises slightly

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Gifts to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Cooperative Program (CP) in November were .51% above gifts for November 2001, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Morris H. Chapman. The \$16,144,487.21 in November CP gifts to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America compared to \$16,062,329.70 in November 2001, a difference of \$82,157.51. Designated gifts of \$3,536,274.34 in November, meanwhile, were 6.19% below the November 2001 amount of \$3,769,431.85, a decrease of \$233,157.51. The SBC operates on an Oct. 1-Sept. 30 fiscal year. For the SBC CP Allocation Budget, the November receipts of \$16,144,487.21 were 109.48% of the budgeted \$14,746,866.83, or \$1,397,620.38 above the budget goal. The SBC CP total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 2001-02 CP Allocation Budget. The CP is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the SBC.

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The protected classes

Another tragic homosexual murder has allegedly taken place in this country, but you probably won't read about this one outside these pages. That's because the homosexual involved in this murder is the suspect, not the victim.

Unlike the Matthew Shepard murder case of several years ago, in which the homosexual victim was fatally beaten and tied to a fence post, this time the homosexual suspect allegedly became enraged when Mary Stachowicz, age 51, of Chicago, questioned him about his sexuality.

According to a December 5 article by Erin Curry of Baptist Press, Chicago police believe Nicholas Gutierrez, age 19, beat and stabbed the devout Catholic woman until he was exhausted, then placed a plastic garbage bag over her head and strangled her to death.

Gutierrez then allegedly dragged her to a crawl space beneath an apartment he occupied in a building that also housed the funeral home where both victim and suspect once worked together. Her body was discovered by police on November 16.

The horror, brutality and senselessness of this crime certainly equal the Matthew Shepard tragedy but unlike the highly-publicized Shepard case, this one is being quietly ignored by the mainstream national news media.

"If a gay man had been murdered for trying to convince someone to be gay, it would be a national news story and deemed a hate crime. But when a gay man murders a woman who tried to convince him to change, the media spike the story. If Matthew Shepard's murder deserved national attention, then why not Mary Stachowicz's?" asks Peter LaBarbera, senior policy analyst for the Culture and Family Institute of Concerned Women for America.

Indeed, why not? "There is no moral difference between these acts," wrote senior staff writer Rod Dreher in the November

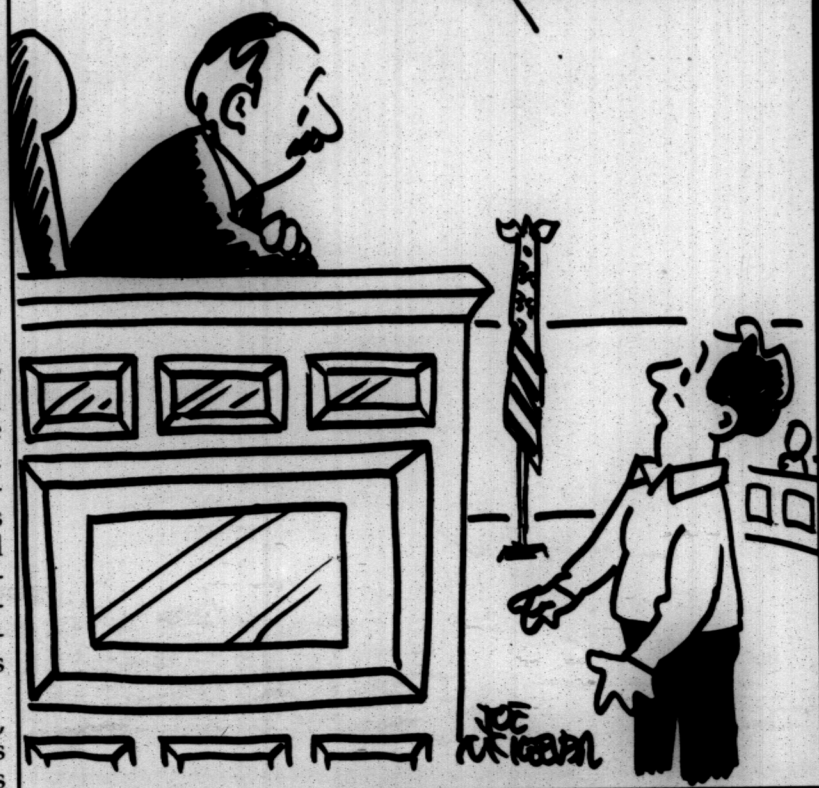
26 issue of National Review magazine. "Both were heinous, and both deserve publicity. Yet the American media made Matthew Shepard an overnight *cause celebre*, and have so far said very little about Mary Stachowicz — just as the media said very little about Jesse Dirkhising, the 13-year-old Arkansas boy raped, tortured, and strangled by homosexuals in 1999."

The obvious reason the news media have averted their eyes and stilled their pens in the cases of Stachowicz and Dirkhising, is because they're playing favorites. To the many liberal elitists who occupy positions of power in the national media, homosexuals, lesbians, and "transgendered" people are members of a protected class that can do no wrong.

Politically-correct, media-protected classes of people — by no means limited to the above list — enjoy a free ride that the rest of us can only view from a great distance. Can you imagine the headlines and lead stories on the nightly news if, say, a Christian murdered someone who questioned him about his religion?

Will there be a Showtime cable network movie about the life of Stachowicz, as there was for Matthew Shepard? Will NBC News devote untold investigative hours getting to the bottom of this crime, as they did for the Shepard story? Will ABC News deliver daily updates on the trial of Gutierrez, as it did on nightly news for the three thugs who killed Shepard?

"YOUR HONOR, I'M
FEELING A LITTLE LIKE
AMERICA RIGHT NOW—
IN DESPERATE NEED OF
SOMEBODY'S PRAYERS!"



Don't hold your breath.

It appears that the American people will never get the straight story from the country's secular news media. The media have lost all credibility in recent years, yet they persist in slanting the truth, protecting their pet causes, and overlooking stories that would bring balance and objectivity to their reporting. They sincerely believe we won't notice. That's the way elitists think.

Keep those facts in mind the next time the national news media attempt to report a story on Christians in general, and Southern Baptists in particular.

GUEST OPINION:

Celebrating God's faithful followers

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board



Southern Baptists' Season of Prayer and giving for international missions has just been completed. This year's International Missions Emphasis theme: "That all people's may know Him: Seek God's passion."

Why? A passion for God begets a passion for the world when, through His eyes, we see people in all their beauty, pain, and need.

Passion is a word you often hear when you ask Boomer, Gen X, and Gen Y missionaries to explain their motivation for going into the world. Earlier generations used words like love, obedience, call, and commitment, but they spring from the same source.

By early December, 29 retired International Mission Board missionaries had died in 2002. To look back on their lives and their deeds is to see holy passion in action. A few glimpses:

- **Sydney Goldfinch** of South Carolina, who died July 28 at age 90, served for 42 years in Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Paraguay. He and his wife went to Paraguay in 1945 as the first resident Southern Baptist missionaries during a tumultuous time of revolution. "There wasn't anybody

else who could go but us," he recalled. So they went, and helped start a Baptist hospital that opened many doors for ministry. Pastor, evangelist, professor, chaplain, counselor, Goldfinch did it all but he always insisted, "There's no substitute for personally sharing the Gospel."

- **Irma Frank** of Illinois, who died Oct. 14 at age 85, went to China as a missionary with her

husband, Victor, in 1947, and moved to Hong Kong after the communists took over. There she wrote, edited, and translated books and materials for Chinese women, teens, and children for nearly 30 years. Her writings sent the Gospel into Chinese-speaking homes throughout East Asia and other parts of the world. "I try to gather materials that can be translated," she once said, "but

if I can't find what we need, I write it." Several generations of Chinese Christians are thankful that she did.

- **Lonnie Doyle** of Mississippi, who died Jan. 2 at 78, cruised by boat up and down the vast Amazon River as he preached the Gospel in equatorial Brazil. His territory was bigger than Alaska, and he helped start more than 40 churches there during nearly as many years. His daughter Margaret once composed a poem in tribute to Doyle and other pioneer missionaries. "Sometimes the going gets rough, and you feel like saying, 'Lord, I've had enough,'" she wrote, "but He takes your hand and leads the way; He takes you from night to everlasting day."

The greatness of a man, said Salvation Army founder William Booth, is the measure of his surrender. These missionaries surrendered their lives to serve a great God, and did so with distinction — and passion.

Bridges is a senior writer for the Southern Baptist International Mission Board in Richmond, Va.



Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions

Goal: \$125 million

**That all peoples
may know Him**

Iraqi hopes to see faith grow in homeland

TORONTO (BP) — Finally, the missiles stopped falling from the sky as the 1991 Persian Gulf War came to an end.

The Iraqi army, which had invaded neighboring Kuwait so confidently the year before, was disintegrating under the pressure of American and other Allied forces sent to extract Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's forces from the tiny Persian Gulf nation.

For weeks, American bombs and missiles rained incessantly on Iraq's capital of Baghdad and other cities but with the war over, Salaam Jaro, now pastor of Arabic Baptist Church in Toronto, saw the time was right to flee his native Iraq to a safer place.

"The Lord has saved me so many times," Jaro said in a recent telephone interview. "I knew he had to have some special purpose for my life."

Prior to the war, Jaro completed the mandatory two years of service in the Iraqi army before taking a job in a weapons manufacturing plant in Baghdad. He had worked at the plant for six years when the war began.

As a military installation,

Jaro's work place soon became a target for American missiles. Although bombs struck the plant several times, miraculously he was not on duty during any of the attacks.

"At other times I was at places which were bombed right after I left," he said. "Some

deemed essential to medical facilities. With gasoline supplies cut off in Baghdad, Jaro even had to drive his wife to the hospital in a car powered by a mixture of oil and propane. For water, people were forced to collect whatever liquid they could from the streets.

"A lot of the water was yellowish, and you had to boil it before you could use it," he said. "It felt like shampoo on your head."

A short time after the war ended, Jaro decided it was time to flee Iraq. Along with his wife Hiva, their two daughters and newborn son escaped across the Turkish border, where they spent three days in a refugee camp.

From Turkey, they made their way by boat

to Greece. There, Jaro worked for three years in a factory making food for dogs, horses, and other animals. In 1994, when the Canadian Embassy in Athens allowed them to move to Canada as refugees, they jumped at the chance.

Canada was where he met Abraham Al-Rihi, a former Arabic Baptist Church pastor who now serves as a missionary to South Asia, and through him, the Lord.

Jaro grew up in a Catholic family. According to statistics from various Catholic sources, about 276,000 Catholics, mainly Chaldean, Syrian, and

Armenian, live in Iraq. He also attended two years of Catholic seminary in Iraq and had even spent time studying Islam and the Koran.

"I had never known about Jesus Christ as Lord before," he said. "I had never heard that God sent His Son to die on the Cross for me to take away my sins."

After becoming a Christian, Jaro said he felt God stretching him to accomplish things he never before felt capable to do. After some time in Toronto, Al-Rihi told Jaro his heart was really in international missions and he asked Jaro to assume the pastorate at the Arabic church. Jaro at first hesitated.

"You'll never be ready in



WAR SURVIVOR — Iraqi native Salaam Jaro (back row, right) and his family pose outside The White House during a recent visit to Washington, D.C. Jaro hopes to return to Baghdad one day on a very special mission. (BP photo)

people I knew in the Iraqi armed forces said they saw bombs coming down in a location right after I walked away."

Jaro not only endured hardship personally, but his wife Hiva gave birth to their son during the war in a hospital with no electricity, natural gas, water, or other items normally

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Youths benefit from church

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Regular religious service attendance, high subjective importance of faith, and years spent in religious youth groups are clearly associated with high self-esteem and positive self-attitudes, according to a recent survey by the National Study of Youth and Religion. U.S. 12th graders who participated in religious youth groups for at least six years are more likely to have positive attitudes toward themselves and feel that they have something of which to be proud those who had never participated in youth groups, according to the report released Dec. 4. Similarly, high school seniors who participated in youth groups for any number of years are significantly more likely to feel good to be alive and to enjoy school than those who have never been in a religious youth group. The 31% of all seniors who attend religious services weekly and the 30% of 12th graders for whom religion is very important are significantly more likely than non-attenders and the non-religious to have positive attitudes toward themselves, enjoy life as much as anyone, feel like their lives are useful, feel hopeful about their futures, feel satisfied with their lives, feel like they have something to be proud of, feel good to be alive, feel like life is meaningful, and enjoy being in school, the report said. For the 18% of seniors who attend religious services only once or twice a month, the data indicated occasional positive associations compared to the 15% who never attend. Religious affiliation is a factor in the attitudes of youth who attend church. Baptists are more likely to have positive attitudes about themselves, feel proud of something, feel hopeful about the future, and enjoy school. The National Study of Youth and Religion is a four-year research project which began in August 2001 and is funded by Lily Endowment Inc.

Looking back

10 years ago

A tornado which struck Sylwarena Church in Smith Association leaves the sanctuary completely destroyed, and only a shell of an education building still standing. "The gymnasium looks like a wadded-up piece of paper," says Pastor Alan Balliet.

20 years ago

Kermit King, director for the Church Training Department for Mississippi Baptists, announces his retirement from that post after 30 years of service. Mose Dangerfield, consultant in the Sunday School Department, is tapped to serve in King's position.

50 years ago

Matthews Church near Oxford has had a short and interesting "career." Organized only three months ago, every person in the small community is now a Christian except for one holdout. The church has 29 resident members and a Sunday School enrollment of 48.



That all peoples may know Him

Lottie Moon
Offering for
International
Missions

Goal: \$125 Million

Young chosen to head Sunday School Dept.

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Kiely D. Young of Gulfport was selected December 3 by the Executive Committee of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) to become the new director of the MBCB Sunday School Department.

Young was serving as associate pastor of Michael Memorial Church in Gulfport when the executive committee approved him for the board position. He replaces David Wills, who died from complications of leukemia on May 31, 2001.

"I am humbled and grateful for this opportunity to serve our Lord and Mississippi Baptists through the MBCB Sunday School Department. We have a rich heritage of Sunday School work upon which to build.

"God has a bright future for us to follow. I look forward to helping lead our churches to new growth, both spiritually and numerically. God's will is for us to grow. We have a great staff in the Sunday School Department to

assist our churches to accomplish God's will," Young said.

In addition to his service at Michael Memorial Church, which included responsibilities for the education ministry, Young has served as:

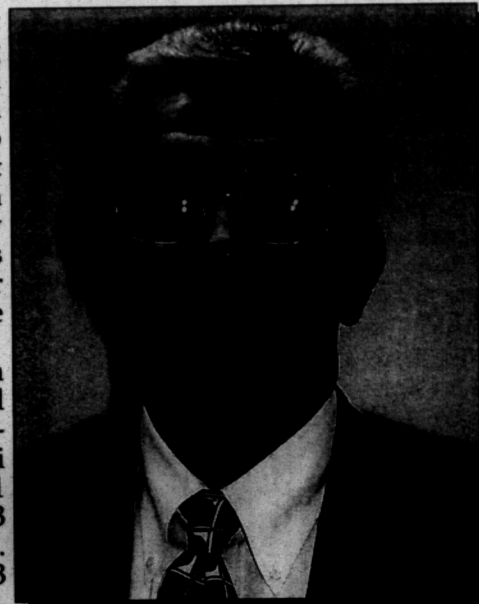
- pastor of First Church, Gulfport, from 1993-99.
 - pastor of First Church, Greenville, from 1987-93.
 - pastor of North Irving Church, Irving, Texas, from 1978-87.
 - associate pastor of Hyde Park Church, Austin, Texas, from 1974-78.
 - pastor of First Church, Goree, Texas, from 1972-74.
 - youth minister (part time) at Shiloh Church, Roanoke, Texas, from 1971-72.
 - pastor of Liberty Church, Toombs, from 1969-70.
 - pastor of Hope Church, Philadelphia, from 1968-70.
- Young is a graduate of Meridian High School ('64), Meridian Junior College (A.A., '66), Mississippi College in Clinton (B.S., '68), and Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth (M.Div., '74, D.Min., '77).

While pastoring part time in 1968-70, Young taught math at Meridian High School and Meridian Junior College. He also taught math and science at Rolling Hills Christian School while in seminary in Ft. Worth, and served as an adjunct Bible instructor at Mississippi College from 1990-93.

Young has occupied a number of denominational offices, including first vice-president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention in 1991 and chairman of the MBCB executive committee in 2001. He has participated in MBCB Missions Mobilization mission trips to Philippines, Japan, Korea, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, and Ukraine.

He has been married to the former Penny Ruth Mayfield for 35 years, and they have three adult children.

"I want to say thank you to Mississippi Baptists for their prayers and patience during the search for a Sunday School Director," said Steve Stone, MBCB associate executive



Young

director for church growth and Young's supervisor.

"I am excited and encouraged that the Lord has called Kiely Young to serve as Sunday School Director. He comes to us with a proven record and a pastor's heart for Sunday School," Stone said.

Young will begin his new duties on January 6.

Ruling for atheist dad affirmed

SAN FRANCISCO (BP) — The federal court of appeals panel that ruled the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional has affirmed its opinion and decided the father who initiated the case may continue his suit.

Michael Newdow, a self-described atheist, is not prevented from pursuing his claim as a parent even though he lost custody of his daughter in February, the three-judge panel of the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals said Dec. 4. Even though Newdow no longer represents his daughter, he maintains standing as a parent to challenge the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in school, the judges ruled.

In the opinion, two members of the panel reiterated their June decision that the pledge's inclusion of "under God" is a violation of the First Amendment's ban on government establishment of religion. Judges Stephen Reinhardt and Alfred Goodwin joined in the opinion. Judge Ferdinand Fernandez concurred Newdow should be able to continue his action but did not join in the other comments of the decision.

After the panel's initial ruling for Newdow in June, it was revealed his eight-year-old daughter did not oppose the pledge and is a member of Calvary Chapel of Laguna Creek, an evangelical church in Elk Grove, Calif.

IMPRESSED WITH NUMBERS

Most of us are not particularly impressed with numbers; or at least when someone is trying to overly impress us with numbers, it seems to have a kind of reverse effect on us. There are some numbers, though, that just seem to reach out and grab us and make an impact on our lives. For instance, I remember the first McDonald's hamburger I ever ate! Actually, I remember two things about that occasion. First, I remember the hamburger cost me only 19 cents, so you know that it wasn't last week! Second, what stands out so vividly to me was pulling into the McDonald's hamburger store and reading the Golden Arches sign that said, "Over One Billion Sold." For those of you who do not remember, McDonald's used to change their signs in front of their stores to say, "Over Two Billion Sold," or "Over Three Billion Sold." Now, if they have it up at all, the sign says "Billions and Billions Sold."

It's hard for me to imagine a million, but I remember buying that first hamburger and thinking about "over one billion sold!" While I do not remember that first hamburger being a gourmet's delight, I've never forgotten the impact of the advertisement — that over a billion of the hamburgers had been eaten by people!

Numbers are important and they can be impressive, but I don't want to just impress you with hamburger sales. Instead, I'd like for you to think about souls! During the emphasis on



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

International Missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, have you heard how many people were reached for Christ and baptized outside the United States last year? That number is just under 400,000. Put that in perspective on a day-to-day basis and you will see that the efforts of our missionaries around the world have resulted in over 1,000, on average, new souls coming into the Kingdom of God daily.

On the Day of Pentecost over 3,000 souls were saved. So, each week it is as though "Pentecost times two" takes place. In fact, it may be closer to "Pentecost times three." It is amazing and that kind of harvest is certainly worthy of our celebration and thanksgiving, but the task is far from complete. Laborers are needed and the Lord of the Harvest continues to call out and send forth servants into the fields. All across the land the Lord is working in the hearts of His people, calling them out to carry the Good News of His Gospel to the people of the world.

Last year (2001) over 1,000 new missionaries were sent out. Again this year (2002) over 1,000 new missionaries were commissioned. Let's put that number in perspective. When Southern Baptists organized in

1845, they were welded together by missions. From the very outset, we were a missionary people. Yet, it took from 1845 to 1955 before we had 1,000 missionaries on field around the world. While it took 110 years before we finally reached the 1,000 missionary mark, now we are seeing over 1,000 a year sent! **To God be the glory, great things He has done!**

The numbers do not stop there. It is imperative that you and I be a part of the great army of prayers and givers so that the world might hear of our Jesus. Your faithfulness in giving throughout the year through the Cooperative Program makes a difference and your giving, specifically here at the end of the year through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, makes a tremendous difference!

Is it too much to ask that we give so that people might know about the saving power of Jesus? Is it too much to ask that we give thoughtfully, enthusiastically, and sacrificially to support our missionaries worldwide? Permit me to put our giving numbers in perspective. Recently, on a front-page, major article in our largest state paper, attention was drawn to deer hunting across our state. It was a fascinating article telling of the tremendous growth that

has taken place in the deer herd from one end of our state to the other. According to the article, the Mississippi deer herd is one of the largest and healthiest in the nation.

What really caught my attention in the article was how much is spent by deer hunters annually. According to the paper, and this is an estimate, deer hunters spend around \$670,000,000 each year. Now, I confess to you that when I read that figure my eyes stopped at that point and I began to argue with the paper and myself that this couldn't be anywhere near right! Or, could it? Maybe, maybe not. I'm not sure what all goes into the expenditures estimated there, but I did begin to do some quick math and added up things like guns, ammunition, licenses, land leases, club memberships, food, meat processing, taxidermists, feeders, and deer stands, and I soon began to realize — we are talking BIG BUCKS!

Now, I'm not picking on deer hunters because I suspect that the same thing can be done if you add up every thing related to your special interest, whether it is fishing, golfing, or antiquing. After arriving at work that day, I checked to see what last year's total gifts, designated and undesignated, given to the Lord's work through Mississippi Baptist churches added up to be. Are you ready? The total gifts, including everything, were \$377,000,000. It makes you stop and seriously evaluate where our true passion really lies!

As you celebrate this Christmas, spend time counting your blessings and spend time blessing the Blesser!

Journeymen adapting to Taiwan collegians |

TAIPEI, Taiwan (BP) — On any college campus in the United States, Vip Vipperman would fit right in. There's the constant, easygoing grin; eyes darting around, looking for eye contact.

A flash of recognition is followed by a pointed exclamation of "Aww, brah! What's up?" — a high-five ready and waiting.

At 6 feet 3 inches, he's one of the tallest guys on the campus of Dongwoo University in Taipei, Taiwan. He stands out, but that's the desired effect.

His appearance is intentional. He spies the bleached, spiked hair of a Japanese rock star with baggy pants and one leg rolled up. A grin escapes as Vipperman approaches. A short conversation in Chinese ends as both reach for their cell phones and punch each other's numbers in memory.

Vipperman, a recent graduate of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, is excited. "Dude! He invited me to practice with the hip-hop club tonight."

UNBOUND STUDENTS

This is what Unbound Student Ministries (USM) is all about, Vipperman explains later. Taiwan, a country with a historical Christian presence, is raising a generation of young people who couldn't care less about God. Disenfranchised from traditional churches, which they describe as boring and irrelevant, students are consumed with identity.

The ministry developed as a vision of Mark and Kandy Persall, Southern Baptist workers who have served in Taiwan for 14 years. Based on the church-planting movement of rapidly reproducing, indigenous churches, the Persalls saw a way to reach Taiwan's sliding generation.

Taken from John 11:44 when Jesus calls Lazarus from the tomb, Unbound Student Ministries seeks to do to the hearts of Taiwan's students what Jesus commanded: "Unbind him and let him go" (NASB).

A hundred yards away from Vipperman, fellow International Mission Board (IMB) journeyman Jenny Matherne, a redheaded former sorority girl from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, sits alone with her Bible in the commons area of the university.

Her cell phone begins to chirp and a dozen kids sitting near her dive into their backpacks. Matherne confirms her location and stays on the phone until she sees the two grinning, waving girls approaching across the commons.

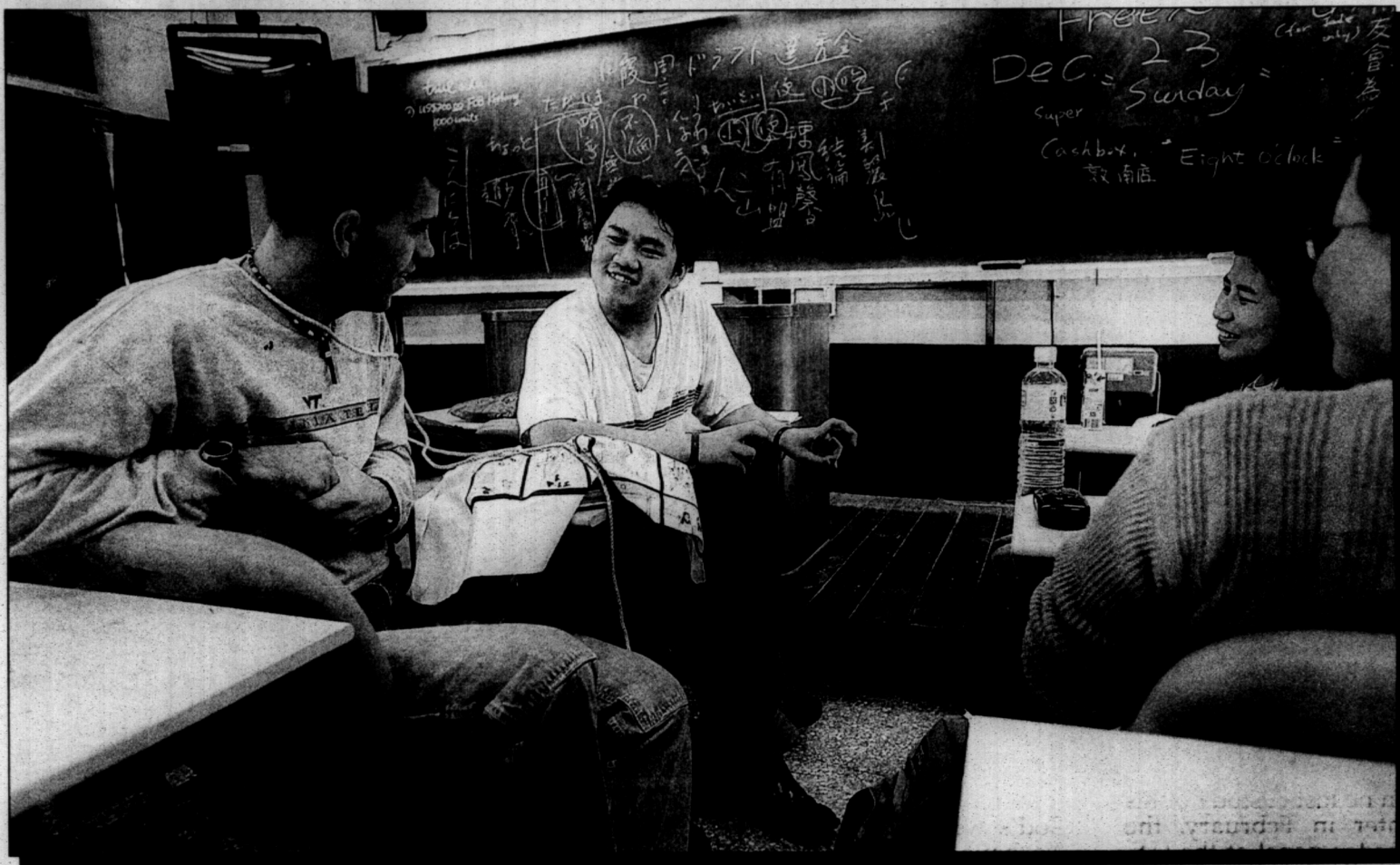
The girls make their way to the cafeteria and find a table where they begin to talk. Surrounded by the smoky smell of Chinese noodles and boiled meat dishes, melded with the clatter of conversation and the clipped chatter of chopsticks from the lunch crowd, the conversation turns to the eternal.

HAVING CHURCH

No one around them even knows that the girls are having church. This is BodyLife — USM's model of a rapidly reproducing, student-led church.

Of the one million college students in Taiwan, 97% are non-Christian. With these kinds of numbers, there is something to be said for wide seed-sowing.

Through a variety of ways such as English clubs utilizing the Bible storying method and the extensive use of volunteers, who, like the USM journeymen spend time on campuses related to students, results are beginning to show. Contact points have been made at universities in three of Taiwan's major cities:



Taipei (TIE-bay), T'ai-chung (TIE-joong) and Kao-siung (GOW-shung).

"We reach out to students who would never set foot in a church and we do it at places where normally they wouldn't have any exposure to the Gospel," Vipperman says. "That means going to where they hang out, finding out what they do, and developing relationships."

At Dongwoo University, that means getting into the club scene. Students spend nearly all of their free time associating with student clubs based on their interest. For journeymen like Vipperman and Matherne, hanging out with the guitar club, the art club, the drum club, the ping-pong club, and even the hip-hop club allows them to relate to the students.

PLUGGED IN

As soon as a student expresses an interest in meeting, they are plugged into BodyLife, made up of no more than five or six other students.

Under the premise of "all being vital parts of the body of Christ," everyone participates and everyone is taught in BodyLife. Believers are taught through the Word and are equipped to start their own BodyLife, reaching more of their friends.

Many Taiwanese students are caught up in a cycle of performance for friends and family, for acceptance, and for grades. They think Christianity involves being qualified — but once they understand the simplicity of the Gospel, change comes fast despite the persecution that comes with going against culture and family. For most new believers, becoming a Christian means turning their back on their family's Buddhist or Taoist faith.

Sara, a Taiwanese student in T'ai-chung, resisted the Gospel for months out of fear of her strong Taoist parents and the belief that she could never qualify for the grace and love she heard Clay Danner, a USM journeyman, describing.

STANDING STRONG

"Clay and the others showed me it's not about qualifications," she says. "I knew my parents would be angry, but then I knew

Jesus would help soften my parents' hearts." After Sara was baptized, the changes in Sara's life were immediately evident, says Danner.

"She knew persecution would come from her family and she leaned on the support of her Christian family. When the persecution started, it led her to dig into the Word and pray even harder for [her family's] salvation," says Danner, a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark.

Jenny, another student in T'ai-chung, says her father has not spoken to her since she became a Christian. Her mother calls her every week to tell her how she has shamed her family and her ancestors.

"God gave me the strength to follow through with baptism, even though my parents opposed it," Jenny says. "I did it because I know I'm not free anymore. I belong to Jesus Christ."

CATALYSTS

As more and more students hear the Gospel and join BodyLife, the goal is to show them that they can be catalysts for spiritual reproduction.

"They get excited," Vipperman says. "They don't know it's not normal to go home and read through several books of the Bible in a day and share with their friends."

Their fellow students need to know about freedom in Christ, says Sara.

"We have to continue to pray and be active in sharing — putting into practice what we're learning in BodyLife. A tree branches out when it grows, and that's what will happen [in Taiwan]. It will grow."

• Volunteers serve as backbone of outreach to Taiwan's students: www.tconline.org/Stories/Sept02/reaching.htm.

• Photos and prayer points: www.tconline.org/Stories/Sept02/taiwan.htm.

• Unbound Student Ministries: www.unbindthem.org.

• Students as missionaries: www.thetask.org.

• Serving as a journeyman: e-mail iscjman@imb.org.

STUDYING THE GOSPEL — Journeyman Vip Vipperman (left) facilitates a BodyLife study group on the Dongwoo University campus in Taipei, Taiwan. Taiwanese students who express an interest in learning more about the Gospel are invited to join a BodyLife group. Each group is comprised of five or six people. (BP photo)



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JUST FOR THE RECORD



Darnell
People Sharing Jesus, brought a leadership team to Iuka for training church members to better

Over 160 people from **Iuka Church, Iuka**, recently shared the gospel with people in the area. William Darnell, interim pastor and President of

share the gospel. One hundred and thirty one people prayed to receive Christ. For more information on People Sharing Jesus, call (901) 754-8686.

First Church, Magnolia, held a dedication service on Nov. 17 for the 157 Operation Christmas Child boxes that were collected and filled by church members. The RAs, GAs, and Mission Friends (pictured) decorated the boxes.

Tylertown Church, Tylertown, baptized 11 people on Nov. 17. They came to know the Lord during Vacation Bible School, Fall Revival, and Judgement House. Michael W. Glenn (left, front row) is pastor.

Branch Church, Morton, will present Christmas Is Jesus Dec. 15 at 5:30 p.m. Norman Huggins is Minister of Music and Michael Giles is pastor.

Sunrise Church, Carthage, will honor Frank Smith, pastor, and his wife, Shirley, with a retirement reception on Dec. 29 from 2-4 p.m. They will reside in Brandon. All friends are invited.

Cedar View Church, Olive Branch, will present a Christmas Cantata, Let Earth Receive Her King, on Dec. 22 at 6 p.m. A fellowship will follow.



New baptisms of Tylertown Church, Tylertown



Children of First Church, Magnolia



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NAMES IN THE NEWS

Oakdale Baptist Church, Brandon, ordained **Franz Cowart, Ray Downey,** and **Todd Hovas** as deacons on Nov. 24. Pictured (from left) are Hovas and his wife Dawn, Cowart and his wife Dean, Downey and his wife Barbara, and Rick Henson, pastor.



Deacons and wives of Oakdale Church, Brandon



Deacons of Plainway Church, Laurel

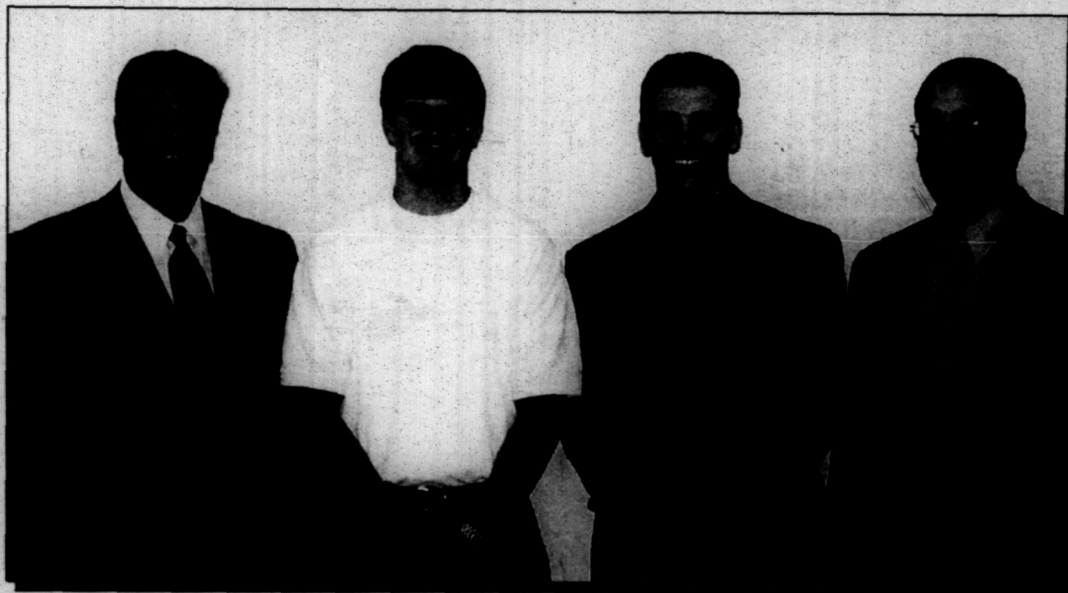
Calvary Church, Pascagoula, ordained **Frank Corder** and **Bill Schattgen** as deacons on Oct. 27. Pictured (from left) are Corder and his wife Linda, Ernie Sadler, interim pastor, and Schattgen and his wife Del.



Frank & Linda Corder, Ernie Sadler, interim pastor, and Bill & Del Schattgen

Plainway Church, Laurel, recently ordained four new deacons. Pictured (from left) are Collette Ishee, William Parker, Greg Jones, Alfred Heidelberg, and Nonnie Jefcoat, pastor.

Bobby Burt, pastor of **First Church, Auburn,** and his wife, **Rana,** coordinator of **WMU/WOM** for Lee County, spoke to the **WOM** of **Calvary Church, Pascagoula,** in November. Rana recently returned from a mission trip to **Mexico.** Pictured (from left) are Rana, **Omigene Griffis,** **Bert Ryan,** and **Burt.** **Charlotte Watts,** a retired missionary to Italy, spoke at the October **WOM** meeting.



Rickey Blythe, pastor, Green, Burgess, and Dwayne Parker

First Church, Flora, recently licensed **Eric Green** and **Kent Burgess** to the ministry. Pictured (from left) are **Rickey Blythe,** pastor, **Green,** **Burgess,** and **Dwayne Parker.**

The **Adult Handbells** of **First Church, Calhoun City,** will perform on Dec. 15 at 11 a.m. The **Sanctuary Choir** will present **A Touch of Christmas** that evening beginning at 6:30 p.m.

The adult and youth choirs of **Antioch Church, Columbus,** will present **Come and See, Go and Tell** on Dec. 15 at 6:30 p.m. For more information, call (662) 328-4767.

The **Sanctuary Choir** of **First Church, Lauderdale,** will present a **Praise and Worship Celebration** on Dec. 15 and 20 at 7 p.m. For more information, call (601) 679-5586.

The choirs of **Bethesda Church, New Haven Church, Oakview Church,** and **Wyndale Presbyterian Church** will present **Come and Worship** on Dec. 13, 7 p.m., **Oakview, Terry;** Dec. 14, 7 p.m., **Wyndale, Terry;** and Dec. 15, 6 p.m., **Bethesda, Terry.** For more information, call (601) 373-7494.



Rana Burt, Omigene Griffis, Bert Ryan, and Bobby Burt

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3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. *(I believe in Jesus.)*
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with him. *(I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)*

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

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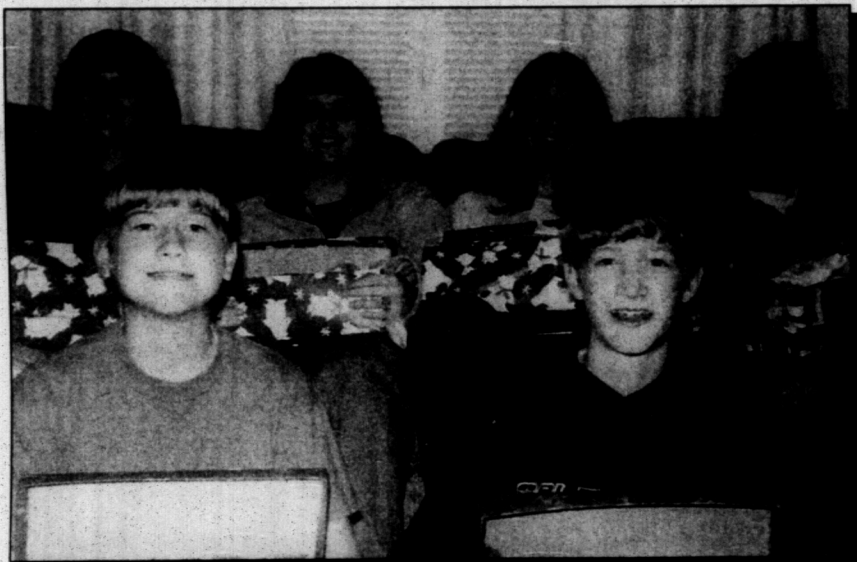
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JUST FOR THE RECORD

The youth of **Beatline Church, Philadelphia**, recently collected church donations and packed 8 boxes for Operation Christmas Child. Pictured (front from left) are Brian Saxon, Jarrod Bates, (back from left) Paige Posey, Brooke Winstead, Dana Apperson, and Wade Akins.



Youth of Beatline Church, Philadelphia

Ben B. James, Jr. was installed on Nov. 17 as Pastor of Utica Church, Utica. Special speakers were Lee Yancey, Jim Futral, and Bill R. Baker, as pictured from left.



Lee Yancey, Jim Futral, Bill Baker, and Ben James

The Helping Hands members of **Magee's Creek Church, Jayess**, WMU recently packed fifty fruit baskets for families with elderly and shut-ins. Pictured (from left) are Dell Magee Clawson, Jo Holmes, Billy Jean Holmes, Nell Yarborough, Eris Rowley, Tibethia Smith, Lyndora Sauls, and Jerry Priest.



WMU of Magee's Creek Church, Jayess

The youth group of **Auburn Baptist, Tupelo**, participated in a mission trip this summer to Benton, Tenn. They participated in Bible Study with children at the Ocoee Village Apartments and helped clean the area around Camp Agape.



GAs of Star Church, Star

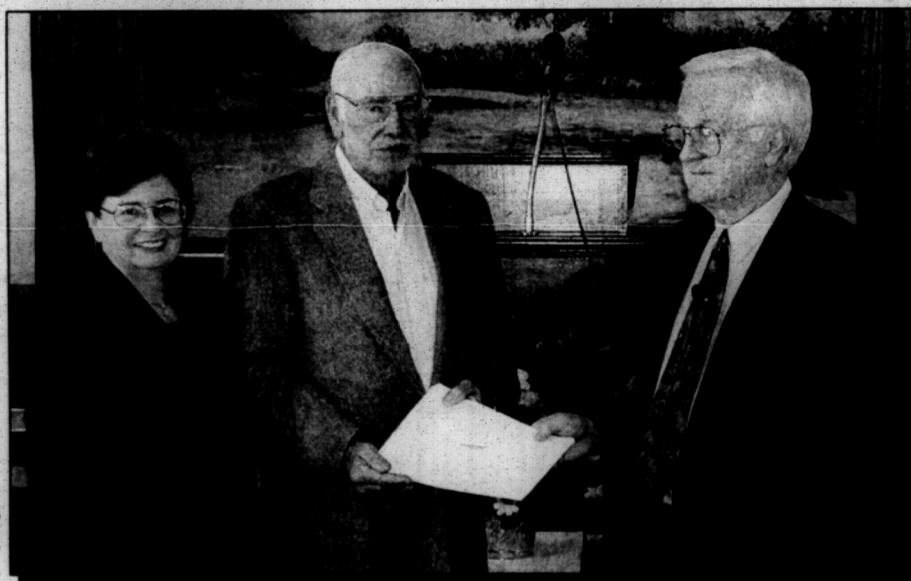
The GAs of **Star Church, Star**, attended a campout with Emogene Harris, former missionary to Nigeria, on Oct. 18-19 at Cato. Pictured are the GAs and Harris.



Steve Pouncey, pastor, Jimmy McLendon, & Chris Whitlock

Mount Vernon, Newton, recently ordained **Jimmy McLendon** and **Chris Whitlock** as deacons. Pictured (from left) are Steve Pouncey, pastor, McLendon, and Whitlock.

Lone Pine Church, Canton, recently ordained **Roy Manning** as deacon. Pictured (from left) are his wife Betty, Manning, and James W. Buie, pastor.



Betty & Roy Manning and James Buie, pastor



Auburn Church Youth, Tupelo


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BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

The William Carey College Winters School of Music will present a Carey Christmas Celebration Dec. 13 at 8 p.m. in the Thomas Fine Arts Center, Hattiesburg. Admission is free. For more information, call (601) 318-6175 or (800) 962-5991, ext. 175.

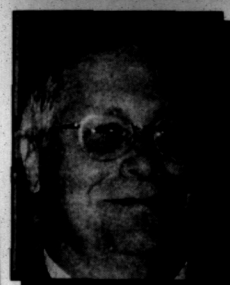
Angela Quinn, ESL Director of New Albany Schools; Rheta Ann West, Education Professor

at Blue Mountain College; Sherrell Settlemyres, English Professor at Blue Mountain College; and Anna Quinn, English Professor at Blue Mountain College presented a program, America's Language, It's a Changing: What's a Teacher to Do?, during the National Council of Teachers of English Convention on Nov. 21-26. Pictured (from left) are Angela Quinn, West, Settlemyres, and Anna Quinn.



Quinn, West, Settlemyres, and Quinn

STAFF CHANGES



Caldwell

Joe S. Caldwell has been called as pastor of Cedar View Church, Olive Branch. He graduated from Mid-America Seminary in May and was ordained in October at Trinity Church, Southaven. Caldwell attended Cedar View as a child when his uncle, Reed Caldwell, was pastor.

Mike Weaver has been called as Interim Pastor to Woodland Church, Pontotoc. He recently served as Interim Pastor at Highland Church, Dennis. He is a Graduate of Blue Mountain College.



Weaver Family

IT'S ABOUT HIM

Editor:

I went to the post office this morning and found my Baptist Record as expected. When I got home I followed my normal pattern and read the Sunday School lesson and turned to Jim Futral's Column. It is always very good, so I read it early and often go back later and read it again.

Wow! He hit the heart this week. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is truly about Him!

It's about Him! That point should make us give more generously, cooperate more fully, live more faithfully, evangelize more consistently, and give Him full control. When we fail to remember "It's about Him" we have controversy over words and other trivia.

Thank you, Jim Futral, for putting the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and everything else in the proper perspective. It's about Him.

Sidney R. Sumrall
Sumrall

RIGHT TO VOTE

Editor:

I want to commend you and Jimmy Porter, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, for the Guest Opinion article in

Commission Christ gave us.

We have stood back for too long and let the liberal agenda get a stronghold throughout our nation. It is most encouraging to see men like Porter take such a stand. Keep up the good work.

Wendell Rogers
Louisville

RECONSIDER MOTION

Editor:

As one who has been very involved in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) since its birth eleven years ago, and as pastor of a church which does much of its global mission work through CBF, I was astonished by the motion presented and passed overwhelmingly at the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) prohibiting anyone from being employed, elected, or appointed to positions of leadership with the MBC if that person is currently serving in an employed, elected, or appointed position with CBF.

Our church gives 10% of its budget to what we call Cooperative Baptist Missions. Fifty-five percent of that goes to the MBC's portion of the Cooperative Program. Most of the remaining 45% goes to CBF, in accordance with our understanding of God's leadership for our church. We have been and remain strong supporters and participants in the many wonderful ministries of MBC.

We are not seeking leadership positions, nor expecting them. We never have! Yet we are disappointed that the convention we love and support singles out our kind of Baptists as people who must not be allowed any leadership roles.

Correctly, I believe, the presiding officer ruled the motion out of order on Wednesday morning, and consequently it was referred to the Constitution and By-laws Committee for study. I respectfully urge all of us to give further prayer and study to this issue. It is my hope that in another convention, without the element of surprise, it can be reconsidered.

Dick Allison, Pastor
University Church,
Hattiesburg



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unsigned letters will not be printed. No multi-copy or form letters will be used.

Each correspondent must include an address and telephone number for verification. In special instances, name may be withheld at writer's request and editor's discretion.

Please include the name of cooperating Mississippi Baptist church where correspondent is a member. (Mississippi Baptists' letters will receive priority when space is limited.)

Letters must be limited to 250 words. All correspondence is subject to editing.

Correspondents should refrain from personal attacks. The opinions expressed in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

No more than one letter from any individual will be printed during a three-month period.

When in the judgement of the editor a given issue has received sufficient attention, correspondence dealing with it will no longer be published and a notice will be printed to that effect.

CLASSIFIED ADS

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SEEKING FULL-TIME MINISTER OF music/youth. Please send resumes to Otter Creek First Baptist Church, 13000 Quail Run Drive, Little Rock, Arkansas 72210, attention: Martha Owens.

FIRST BAPTIST - NORPHLET, SEEKING full-time youth minister with music or education skills. Resumes to: P.O. Box 10, Norphlet, AR 71759, (870) 546-2573.

the November 21 issue of The Baptist Record.

As Christian men and women, we must exercise our rights to vote and participate in our governing bodies if we are to carry out the Great

MS POSITIONS AVAILABLE

STUDENT MINISTER SOUGHT BY church averaging 154 in Sunday School/70 in Discipleship Training. Mail to Longview Baptist, c/o Johnny Sykes, 406 Dozier Hill Rd., Belden, MS 38826. Church located 6 miles east of Pontotoc, MS/10 miles west of Tupelo, MS.

SEEKING TO FILL NEW POSITION: Children's Director, Immanuel Baptist Church, 6949 Hwy 61 South, Vicksburg, MS 39180, contact person: Donnie Tedford at (601) 636-0482.

THE TRI-COUNTY IS SEEKING AN Associate Associational Missions Director to assist in missions involvement and education. Resumes may be sent to Tri-County Baptist Missions, P.O. Box 350, Columbia, MS 39429. Resumes will be received until December 31, 2002.

ADATON BAPTIST CHURCH, Starkville, Miss. is seeking an individual for full-time

Music Minister position. Please contact the church at (662) 323-3735 for more information. Send resume to ABC, 1975 Hwy. 82 West, Starkville, MS 39759.

JOB OPENING - NEWLY restructured position. Preschool Ministry Director; full-time position, Harrisburg Baptist Church. Salary \$25-30k; call for job description at (662) 842-6917.

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, Hattiesburg, Miss. is currently seeking a bi-vocational minister of music. Please send resumes: c/o Music Search, Calvary Baptist Church, 3139 Oak Grove Road, Hattiesburg, MS 39402.

FULL-TIME YOUTH MINISTER position available at Center Hill Baptist Church, Hamilton, Mississippi. College graduate with musical background preferred. Email resume to pastorcenterhill@telepak.net or mail to P.O. Box 59, Hamilton, MS 39746.

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IMB pens Lebanon agreement

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP) — Lebanese Baptists and the International Mission Board (IMB) have renewed an old friendship to see churches planted in every neighborhood of Lebanon.

Leaders of the Lebanese Baptist Society and the IMB signed a ministry partnership plan Oct. 12, committing to three goals for Lebanon: every person hearing the Gospel, every home receiving a copy of God's Word, and every neighborhood having a church.

Southern Baptists started working with Lebanese Baptists in 1921, but a civil war that erupted in 1975 forced IMB workers from the country. Calmer days have allowed the partnership to be re-established.

Approximately 70% of Lebanon's three million people are Muslim. Lebanon is the only country in the region in which Muslims who turn to Christ have been able to safely announce their new faith in public.

The recent murder in Sidon, Lebanon, of Baptist missionary nurse Bonnie Witherall is not expected to slow the effort to reach Lebanon for Christ. Witherall was working under missionary appointment by the Christian and Missionary Alliance, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., when she was gunned down for her evangelistic activities (see article at right).

To learn more about the IMB/Lebanon Baptist Society outreach effort, visit www.beirutandbeyond.com.

Ridgecrest's Mountain Laurel Inn opened

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Ridgecrest Conference Center celebrated the grand opening and dedication of its newest addition, the Mountain Laurel Inn, on Nov. 25, but the 120-room hotel is just part of a much larger plan to bring new life to both of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention conference centers.

Revitalization at LifeWay's Ridgecrest Conference Center and Glorieta Conference Center is proceeding well, said Mike Arrington, vice president of LifeWay's corporate affairs division. "With the addition of our national director Byron Hill and his outstanding staff, along with the local leadership of Bill Bowman at Ridgecrest and Rick Tanner at Glorieta, we have made great strides in bringing outstanding men of God into our hospitality ministry," Arrington said. "As a result, we are providing the finest places of Christian training and spiritual renewal in the country."

Approximately 200 guests and employees attended the Mountain Laurel Inn dedication ceremony, during which



NEW ROOMS — The 120-room Mountain Laurel Inn is the newest facility at LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina, part of an comprehensive revitalization at the Ridgecrest and at LifeWay Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico. (BP photo)

LifeWay President James T. Draper Jr. and Bowman spoke, while other participants shared their testimonies through word and song.

Designed to transform the Ridgecrest, N.C., and Glorieta, N.M., conference centers into premier retreats with a focus on God's purpose and spiritual

renewal, the revitalization is already in full swing. LifeWay trustees recently approved a revised 10-year plan that will propel the spiritual retreats and their ministries into the 21st century, according to Hill.

"The revitalization plan is designed to touch every part of the campus and either total-

ly renovate existing buildings or build new ones," Hill said. "Upon completion of our 10-year plan, we will have set these campuses up for another 20-30 years of ministry. Literally millions of people have attended these conference centers and we want to see God continue to work through them."

Most recently, Ridgecrest opened the Mountain Laurel Inn, a 120-room hotel with conference space for 250 guests, and dedicated the new 300-seat Rutland Chapel, a rustic setting with a state-of-the-art sound and video projection system. Revitalization efforts at Glorieta include an improved Chaparral Inn and Glorieta Lake.

Additionally, the revitalization plan includes construction plans to build a second new hotel and dining hall at Ridgecrest, and two new hotels and an indoor recreation center at Glorieta.

Last year, more than 92,000 guests visited LifeWay's two conference centers, and 1,200 campers participated in various programs and camps — making more than 2,300 spiritual decisions.

Christians draw together after missionary's death

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Evangelical Christians in southern Lebanon are uniting in prayer and fellowship following the Nov. 21 murder of a Baptist nurse who worked at a missionary clinic in Sidon, according to a Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB) worker based in the country.

Bonnie Penner Witherall, age 31, was shot three times in the head at close range with a 7-millimeter pistol, the police said, and collapsed in a pool of blood inside the door of the two-story building that housed both the Unity Center clinic where she worked and an evangelical church.

Police said they believe she was murdered because of her evangelical outreach to Muslim women.

Witherall and her British-born husband, Gary, were partner missionaries with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, based in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Since Witherall's death, workers in southern Lebanon have seen what one IMB representative called "incredible developments."

"The other week, I sat as two leaders in the evangelical community asked one another for forgiveness for not working together and then they pledged to work together," said the rep-

resentative who asked not to be identified due to security precautions. "During the past couple of days, we have been overwhelmed as local believers and missionaries have expressed interest in our vision and plans."

Witherall's death also led to the first community-wide prayer meeting in Sidon.

"There is not only a sense of the need to work together, but people are doing it," the representative said. "This was only a burden on many people's hearts a few weeks ago. Bonnie's death was the sounding of the horn to rally together."

"We are seeing more interest in the work here than we have in a long time," the representative told Baptist Press. "Daily, we are receiving e-mail from people all over the world asking how they can pray and be a part of what God is doing here. We stand ready with an answer."

The IMB representative said he met Witherall and her husband about eight months ago, along with some other clinic workers. He joined Gary Witherall during an August street witnessing campaign.

"Both Bonnie and Gary had a real passion for people, especially that others would experience their Savior," he said. "I count them to be heroes as they had a very impacting ministry in a

very difficult part of Lebanon."

While Christians are allowed to live and worship freely in Lebanon, the representative said Muslim militants strongly objected to their evangelism efforts. "They tried to resort to violence to stop the work," he said. "The only problem is that violence will not stop the work of God."

The representative compared Lebanese Christians to the Christians written about in the New Testament Book of Acts. "The believers are coming together and praying for boldness and courage," he said. "But it does not stop with prayer; many are also taking more public stances for the Gospel."

Despite the threat of persecution and death, the representative said he is not fearful for his life. "It's a question I've had to work through. By no means am I desirous to make my wife a widow," he said. "However, I am willing to lay my life down for the sake of the Gospel. From a day-to-day perspective, I am not fearful at all. We, the [expatriate] community, have found an outpouring of love during the past couple of weeks. This love is not just coming from the local believers; it is also coming from Muslims in the community. I feel safer here than I do in America."

The IMB representative said he believes Witherall's death will impact the ministry in

Lebanon, but time will tell whether believers will stand up for the sake of the Gospel or hide from the Muslim extremists.

"Unfortunately, as we look at church history, we have a history of believers running and hiding from any possible attacks," he said. "I pray and hope that this will not be the response. My heart tells me that God is working mightily in Lebanon and Bonnie's murder is a testimony of it."

"I think that the cost of her life will be a more bold and courageous witness in Lebanon," he said. "I would not be surprised if within the next couple of years, we find churches being planted in every part of Lebanon."

The representative said he is praying that God would send laborers to Lebanon to take advantage of the openness to the Gospel and "the openness that we have to share in Lebanon."

As for critics in the media and some religions denominations who believe that Christians should not proselytize Muslims, the representative argued that believers are required to share the Gospel to everyone.

"The greatest apostle in the New Testament was the leading terrorist before his conversion," he said, referring to Paul. "We need to reach out to all people with the good news of Jesus Christ. People are searching for and longing to know God. We must tell them."



Witherall

FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Seeking Faithful Obedience

Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-15, 19-23

By Shirley Stough

None of us can maintain completely stress-free lives. When the storms of life begin to rage, we yearn to hear the voice of God. In really stressful times, we need to hear Him. Many characters from the Bible have shown us how to seek God and to listen to God. One character who experienced traumatic, dangerous events was Joseph. His actions have proved him to be a consistent role model of one who listens to God and actively obeys Him.

Joseph faced an unexpected, traumatic event graciously. Joseph and Mary were in the second stage of the Jewish marriage process. They were engaged, not yet married. The betrothal was a legal, binding pledge made by the couple. An engagement could be terminated only by

divorce. When Mary returned from her three-month visit with her cousin Elizabeth, Mary was pregnant. Feeling betrayed, Joseph wrestled with the options of justice or of love. He could allow her to be punished to the letter of the law, which was stoning, or he could quietly divorce her. He decided to divorce her quietly. Because he loved her and was a righteous man, he sought to spare her further embarrassment. Under the circumstances, he could have retaliated in anger; yet he dealt with this unexpected, disappointing circumstance with love and mercy.

Joseph trusted God's word courageously. Before Joseph had opportunity to act on his decision to divorce Mary, an angel appeared to him in a dream. The angel's message



Stough

included some of the same information Mary had received from an angel: Mary had been chosen virgin-birth mother of God's Son, who was to be named Jesus. In Joseph's message the angel added that the name Jesus means "the Lord saves." Joseph was also told not to be afraid to marry Mary, for the marriage was part of God's plan. This virgin-birth would be a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Joseph knew this prophecy and believed it. When Joseph awoke he did not question or object to God's message. He married Mary as soon as possible. Joseph's actions proved his faith in God's word and his obedience to God. To act on God's instructions required not only faith but also courage because Joseph would certainly be the object of ridicule and gossip for marrying a pregnant girl. Herschel Hobbs clearly pointed out the unique courage of Joseph: "Under the lash of public scorn Mary's tender flesh would quiver. But always

between her and the lash stood Joseph. His strength became her strength. Surely God in omniscience chose her who was to be the mother of His Son. But with equal wisdom He placed His hand upon him who was to be His foster-father." Doing God's will in a difficult situation is a test of faith. God expects action, not merely promises or good intentions. Joseph passed the test of obedience.

Joseph heeded God's warnings immediately. While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem to register for the census, Jesus was born. Wise men came to Bethlehem to see the Messiah. Their coming alerted Herod to the birth of a king. Herod became alarmed that the baby was a threat to his reign; thus he sought to kill boy babies under two years of age. Appearing to Joseph in a dream, an angel warned Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt out of Herod's jurisdiction. When Joseph awoke, he did not wait for morning to depart. The cruelty of Herod was common knowledge; therefore, immediate action was necessary. Joseph responded

without delay.

Joseph followed God's directions consistently. Again an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream with the message that Herod had died. Joseph was told to take his family back to Israel. When they arrived in Israel, Joseph discovered that Archelaus, a cruel son of Herod, ruled in Judea. Discerning that this area was unsafe, Joseph quietly waited on the Lord to lead. God sent an angel to warn Joseph to go to Nazareth. Again, Joseph followed God's instructions without complaint, question, or delay.

God spoke to Joseph often but never revealed His entire plan. As God faithfully guided the way, Joseph took one step at a time. Humbly submissive to the Lord's will, Joseph trusted the Lord to reveal what he needed to know at the right time. He listened for the slightest whisper from the Lord, allowing the Lord to control his life. Joseph modeled a view of obedience that God expects from every Christian.

Stough is a member of First Church, Picayune.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

A Productive Life

John 15:1-17

By Don Wilson

The image that comes to mind when I think of vines is the fence that borders the back of the Hopper's yard. Muscadine vines completely covered the fence and above it. I had seen that kind of vine before, but had never seen them covered with wall-to-wall muscadines like this one. I remember picking gallons, it seemed, never moving from one spot. Now that is what vines are made to do. In John 15, Jesus says that bearing fruit is what His disciples were made to do.

I. CLEAN BRANCHES (John 15:1-3)

Jesus said: "I am the vine and My Father is the vinedresser." As the gardener, the Father has the right to trim away and clean any part of the vine. The source of vitality for the branches is the vine-Jesus

Himself. Believers are the branches (15:5) on which the fruit is borne. Everything that is necessary for fruit-bearing is present: a vine, a gardener, and branches.

A common problem with vines and Christians is the absence of fruit. In John 15:2 Jesus mentions two requisites for bearing fruit: taking away branches and pruning. The word translated "taking away" can also be translated "lift up." I have grown running butterbeans and understand what happens when the vines get on the ground. They shrivel and quit growing. The result is no butterbeans. The key is to keep the end of the vine on something going up. When those dirty vines are cleansed of the mud and placed on some kind of support, they will thrive and



Wilson

produce butterbeans. The same is true of us. Without God's cleansing touch, we will never bear fruit.

The second action taken by the gardener is pruning. Cutting away unnecessary wood is essential to the production of fruit. I grow roses and have come to realize that only beautiful, healthy roses grow when proper pruning has been done. Our spiritual lives often fill with fluff (my word for all the space-filling stuff in our lives that is of little value). As God chops away at your life, guard against resentment. His work has one goal—to cause you to bear much fruit.

II. CLINGING BRANCHES (John 15:4-15)

The most important activity of a branch is really not action at all; it is inactive activity. The very nature of a branch is to abide in the vine. Nine times in this passage Jesus used this word "abide." Abiding and bearing fruit are inseparably connected. The relationship of

the believer with Jesus is the heart of the matter. Abiding refers to being so intertwined with Jesus that you can do nothing without thinking of Him. Jesus said, "...without me you can do nothing" (15:5). You cannot have life, you can have no nourishment, and you will have no fruit. Abiding is living a life so close to Jesus that no decision is made without seeking His direction, no day is begun without communicating with Him, and His presence constantly blankets.

Branches that cling are also involved in more active pursuits. They pray. Those who abide can actually pray to the Father and be assured that He hears and will answer. These folk have actually learned what praying is all about because they ask "in Jesus' name" (14:14). That simply means that they pray with a view of the character of Jesus and confidence that He will always act in a way that is consistent with that character. Abiding branches also glorify God (15:8) because they produce fruit and by it prove that they are disciples of Jesus. They abide in

the love of Jesus (15:9-10) and have a supernatural ability to love one another (15:12). They have learned the joy of obedience (15:11).

III. CHOICE BRANCHES (John 15:16-17)

Disciples ordinarily would choose what teacher they wanted to attach to. Jesus informed this group that He was the one who had chosen them. His choice, however, had more to do with the fruit they would bear than anything else. Jesus was telling both those followers and me that His appointment was for the purpose of going out to bear fruit before a needy, hungry world. Many need to see fruit that only Jesus can produce. Our self-grown fruit is small, shallow, and shriveled. The Jesus desires to grow is large, abundant, and life-changing. The central focus of any believer's life is a close-knit relationship with Jesus that encompasses the whole of life.

Wilson is pastor of Pleasant Ridge Church, Dumas.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats,



no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. Requests to return photographs must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

State Conventions hold annual meetings

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico Baptists dedicated a new state convention building and approved a \$3.5 million budget, forwarding 30.5 percent to SBC causes. Larry Haslam of Santa Fe, a former director of the

elected as convention president. A current partnership with Alaska Baptists was extended two more years. Messengers also voted to set in place a biannual budgeting process and approved resolutions to study how North Carolina

Baptists might respond to the recent dismissal of chaplains by the North Carolina Baptist Department of Corrections. Messengers also voiced gratitude to North Carolina legislators for rejecting a lottery referendum.

OKLAHOMA

The Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma adopted resolutions addressing covenant marriage, a state lot-

tery, Internet pornography, evangelistic prayer and biblical repentance. Messengers elected Wade Burleson of Enid as president and passed a \$22.4 million budget, forwarding 40 percent to SBC missions and ministries. An update on improvements to Falls Creek Baptist Assembly reported \$11 million in pledges received. Sustained involvement in partnerships with Arizona, Mexico, Rome and China was encouraged.

PENNSYLVANIA/ SOUTH JERSEY

Messengers elected Terry Douglas of Peachbottom, Pa., as president of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-

South Jersey. A flat budget of \$3.16 million was approved, forwarding 15 percent of CP receipts to SBC causes. Messengers expressed appreciation to retiring associational missionary Bob Tallent.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The South Carolina Baptist Convention celebrated the 10-year Empowering Kingdom Growth emphasis and elected Hal Lane of Greenwood as president. A \$32.15 million budget was approved, forwarding 40 percent to SBC missions and ministries. The budget committee chairman observed that EKG had provided South Carolina Baptists with a focus larger than issues that might separate the convention, enabling eight years of exceeding the budget goals. Messengers also heard a report of the reorganization of state convention staff and passed resolutions urging support of EKG as the five-year strategy for spiritual awakening in South Carolina; evangelistic outreach and ministry to homosexuals; ministry to crime victims; prayer regarding Iraq; urging churches to denounce domestic violence; praising the state's General Assembly for approving a license plate bearing the words "In God We Trust"; and affirming the biblical image of marriage and belief in the biblical doctrine of creation while opposing teaching on evolution.

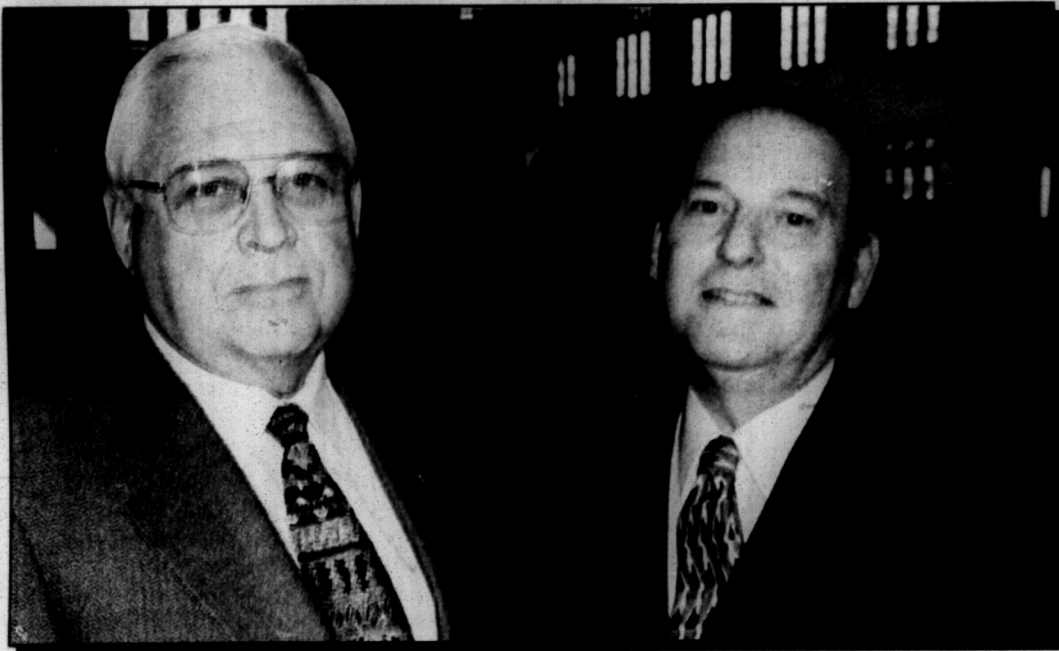
TENNESSEE

A vote on expanding the role of convention officers to include appointive powers failed to receive the necessary

two-thirds majority need to change the Tennessee Baptist Convention constitution. Ronnie Wilburn of Memphis was elected president and messengers approved a \$37,191,907 budget, sending 37.5 percent to SBC missions and ministries. Partnerships with The Baptist Mission of Portugal and the Carioca Baptist Convention in Rio de Janeiro were extended. Resolutions expressed concern to the SBC Annuity Board on major increases in health insurance premiums and requested state legislators allow input on regulatory bodies from Tennesseans who opposed the recently approved lottery.

TEXAS - BGCT

Messengers approved a \$50.8 million budget that increases the amount kept in state to 79 percent, from the previous 72.3 percent of receipts. The budget also allows churches to select the recipient of those funds from among the SBC, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or a BGCT-designed worldwide effort. The BGCT will no longer place restrictions on funds sent to the SBC in order to defund the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission or cap the amount going to SBC seminaries. A new missions network was approved that connects BGCT churches to mission opportunities with other churches, associations, institutions and partnerships. Bob Campbell of Houston was re-elected without opposition to serve as president. Messengers rejected a proposal to embrace the BF&M 2000 as a guiding theological statement for its ministries.



NOBTS ALUMNI OFFICERS

— New officers for the Mississippi chapter of the New Orleans Seminary (NOBTS) Alumni Association are Mike Glenn (right), president and pastor of Tylertown Church, Tylertown; and Nathan Barber, vice-president and pastor of Immanuel Church, Hattiesburg. Randy Von Kanel (not pictured), pastor of First Church, Tupelo, was elected to serve as secretary-treasurer. The new officers were chosen at a seminary luncheon held in conjunction with the late October annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. (BR special photo)

SBC Glorieta conference center, was elected convention president. A resolution commended the Baptist Convention of New Mexico's executive director, Claude Cone, and the president of the New Mexico Baptist Foundation, Lee Black, for their leadership in avoiding controversy and making sound investments. Among resolutions was a pledge to pray for missionaries.

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Baptist Convention messengers adopted a \$37.55 million budget and voted to study whether one of four giving plans is in violation of the constitution since it provides no funds for SBC causes. Jerry Pereira of Swannonoa was re-

Chinese Christian leader on prison hunger strike

BEIJING (BP) — The leader of an underground Chinese church has been on a hunger strike for nearly a month in protest of his jailers' confiscation of documents from his prison cell. Gong Shengliang, the 47-year-old founder of the South China Church, was originally sentenced to death in December 2001 by a court in the Hubei province for various crimes, including "using an evil cult to undermine the enforcement of the law" and raping some of his followers, according to The Washington Post Dec. 6.

As a visit of China's president to President Bush's Texas ranch in October approached, Hubei's highest court threw out the death sentence Sept. 22 along with the cult charges but in a retrial, Gong was given a life sentence Oct. 10. Hours before Gong's scheduled execution in January, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell personally appealed to Chinese President Jiang Zemin on Gong's behalf. He was granted a reprieve and retrial.

Visitors allowed to see Gong in prison in early March said the cuffs on his wrists and legs "were so tight, and had been on so long, that you could see bones," a source reported. "His whole face was bruised and swollen, and his mouth and lips were broken. He was in tremendous hunger."

Gong's case illustrates the tensions between the more progressive factions within the central government who have sought to modify China's repressive religious practices and the local authorities in Hubei who are committed to stamping out evangelicals. The Post reported.

Experts say it is most likely the rape charges were thrown in by police or prosecutors to justify a death sentence last December, though Gong may not have committed the offenses.

Gong led a successful evangelical Protestant group in China that reports about 100,000 members. Since its beginning in 1991, the South China Church has dispatched missionaries throughout China and is known to be active in 10 provinces, according

to The Post. The church operated a seminary, a publishing house and a bimonthly magazine contrary to Chinese law. The church leader began his hunger strike Nov. 14 after prison officials confiscated legal documents critical to the appeal of his case.



CORRECTION — Incorrect information was included in the cutline of this photograph published in the December 5 issue. New officers for the Mississippi Conference of Associational Missions Directors are (from left) Alton Foster, Mississippi Association, president-elect; Jim Harrington, Monroe Association, treasurer; J. C. Prather, Prentiss Association, president; and Paul Blanchard, Winston Association, secretary. The Baptist Record regrets the error. (BR photo by Tony Martin)

Bibliocipher

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BYLZL LPWME ZFMG

MEYD, DX DYPM WL

MG UG MEY VWSS GT EWD

MEPM LYFM DY, PFU MG

TWFWLE EWL VGKA.

BGEF TGZK:

MEWKMX-TGZK

Clue: M=T

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark Two: Twenty-Eight